



North Dakota House of Representatives

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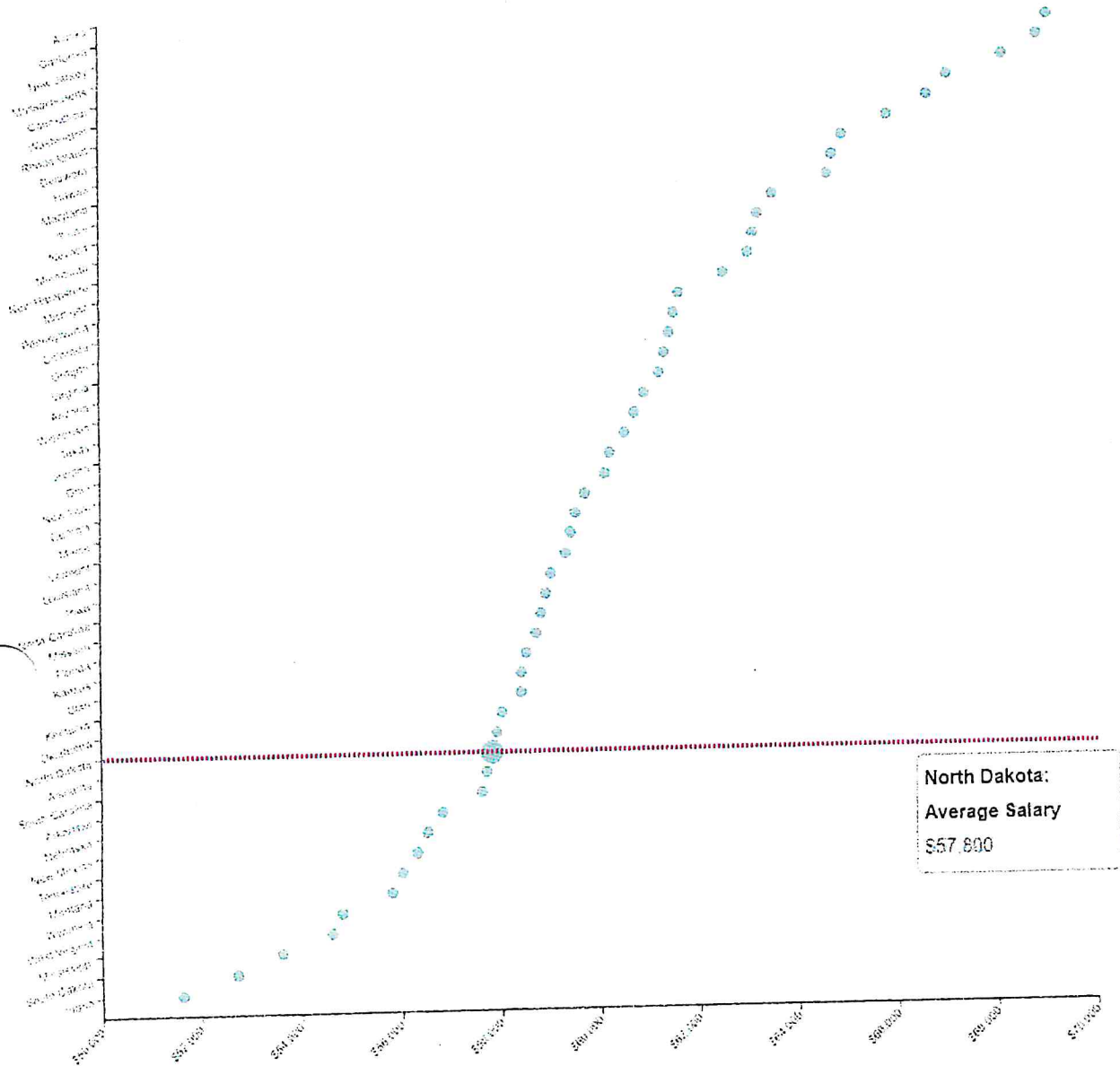
Chairman Vigesaa and Members of the Appropriations committee, my name is Steve Vetter representing District 18. I am here before you to introduce House Bill 1184 which seeks to deal with workforce retention of our peace officers, and also reward our experienced officers with an effective increase in salary by giving all ND peace officers beginning their 5th year of ND service, a bonus of \$6,000 every year.

As of now, North Dakota law enforcement are slightly undercompensated when compared to their peers and substantially undercompensated when compared to states in the top 10. According to data, the average peace officer earns \$57,800, which by national standards would rank us in the bottom 30% of all states for peace officer compensation. The graph in my testimony shows the average compensation of peace officers or their equivalent in all states across the United States:

In addition, with lower salaries come lower net pensions, as pension formulas are based on your total net salary, which ultimately means not only are they being paid less during their career, but they are forced to retire on much lower salaries. It is as a result not particularly surprising that we have a massive workforce retention issue. Most notably, 50% of our population lives near the Minnesota border, which pays on average \$63,000 a year, which makes our wages not just uncompetitive nationally, but incredibly uncompetitive for those who live in the Red River Valley.

In recognizing this, I believe that our experienced officers deserve an appreciation annual bonus for staying in the state. The bill provides a \$6000 bonus for officers with 4 years or more of experience, which would bring their compensation roughly equal with neighboring Minnesota. In this chamber we talk frequently about Backing the Blue. This bill gives you a chance to put your money where your mouth is. Next year when half of us go out to campaign, do you want to talk about how ND backs the blue or tell your constituents that it just costs too much to back the blue?

This session the talk has been about workforce retention and development, but it is almost impossible to keep talented staff when you are effectively asking them to bear the burden of 10% less pay. This creates the continued problem of talent and brain drain from our state, and in the case of law enforcement can literally endanger our community. Inexperienced officers are more likely to make mistakes, as they lack the wisdom that comes from being on the job, and such mistakes can be fatal and impact the safety of our state.



Why would someone want to live in North Dakota versus Minnesota or a nearby state? Example: Talk about Minneapolis. I believe the most popular reason why people want to live in North Dakota is safety and it's a great place to raise a family. Haven't you heard this before? "I would want my child to be blessed with a great place to live like I did". One way we can continue this tradition is to pass HB 1184 and in doing so ensure that we as a state maintain the most experienced peace officers to keep our state safe.

I'm assuming someone might ask why \$6,000 and why after the 4th year? First, it brings us into parity with Minnesota. I originally wanted to do it as \$500/month, but I learned that doing it monthly would add an administrative cost to the bill. However, if done annually, the POST board said they come up with the list of peace officers that meet the 4-year qualifier annually for no cost. Why the 4th year? We lose a lot of our officers

after 2-3 years after they get their training in and become an easy hire for another state because of their experience. At 3 years the fiscal note is significantly larger, so I decided to move it to 4 years.

This is a workforce issue beyond just the retention of peace officers. This bill tells everyone we back the Blue in our state, we have experienced officers, and our state is a safe place to raise a family. This gives workers another reason to live in North Dakota.

Chairman Vigesaa, members of appropriations committee, I'm hoping you give this a Do Pass recommendation so we can make it Better! Thank you for your time and consideration. I will stand for questions.